

**ALCHEMY AND ABERRANT BEHAVIOUR:
A JUNGIAN APPROACH TO WORKING WITH BOYS WITH
BEHAVIOUR DISORDERS**

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Alchemy is an ancient philosophy on which the two modern day sciences of chemistry and analytical psychology are grounded.

In education in New South Wales (NSW) at the present time, the behaviour of boys is of increasing concern to schools, to teachers, to parents and to society at large as evidenced by the over-representation of boys in school suspension figures, detention and intensive learning classes, remedial reading and behaviour units, special programs and special schools.

This paper outlines an action research study of the aberrant behaviour of seven boys from Sydney schools who were all clinically diagnosed as emotionally, conduct or behaviourally disordered. Jung's alchemic process was employed to assist each boy to understand his inner conflict and how it contributed to his behaviour. This approach was able to successfully bring about positive change in the unacceptable, challenging, aberrant behaviour of each of the boys. One boy's process is outlined in more detail.

Terms used in this paper:

Aberrant – disturbed behavior that represents a deviation from expected social behaviour.

IST(B) – Itinerant Support Teacher for Behaviour.

Behaviour Disorders – a generic term for students who display emotional, behavioural and /or conduct difficulties and disorders.

Over many years of involvement in special education, this author has observed that the behaviour of boys in schools and in society has deteriorated to a point where boys may be considered to be in crisis. It is for this reason that the term aberrant has been used in this paper to describe the behaviour of the boys, because it appears deviant, out of balance and indicative of a more serious social phenomenon. Furthermore, the inability or unwillingness of schools to develop and implement effective strategies to adequately cope with this increasingly aberrant behaviour of boys seems to have left education in crisis. Many different strategies and approaches to the education of boys have been tried and suggested and have met with varying degrees of success. Yet, still, many boys continue to struggle academically and socially and the great majority of students identified and classified as having behaviour disorders in schools in NSW continue to be over-whelmingly boys. Boys and young men also constitute a high proportion of students in detention classes and detention centres, in remedial classes and programs, and in units for disturbed behaviour. In light of this, the effectiveness, implementation and suitability of any strategies and approaches that have been employed so far have to be questioned. Observations of boys in dropout centers or any *Timezone*, casualty wards or in many schools, particularly many secondary schools, across NSW will tell the same story.

In fact, the behaviour of students in schools has become of such concern in NSW that eleven special schools for *disruptive and unruly students and bullies* (Vass, 2001, p1) have been established. It will be no surprise that many of the students in these schools are, and will be, boys. Boys are struggling, as shown in an overview of the statistics.

NSW STATISTICS

- Boys are nine times more likely to be in detention classes or expelled from schools.
- Risk-taking behaviour is more common in males and condoned by peer and societal pressure from other males and from many females.
- Males commit suicide at a significantly higher rate than females and the Australian male youth suicide rate is reportedly the second highest in the world.
- The caseloads of IST(B) teams in the Metropolitan East Region of Sydney are comprised mostly, and in some areas completely, of boys.
- Most of the students with learning difficulties are boys and some research estimates that up to twenty percent of male children has some form of attention deficit disorder often displayed as a behaviour disorder or learning difficulty.
- Autism Spectrum Disorder, with all its associated problems affects boys four times more commonly than girls.
- Boys are now displaying the symptoms of compulsive disorders such as anorexia nervosa, anxiety, neurosis and mental illness in much greater numbers than previously.
- Boys are over-represented in remedial reading and intensive learning classes, and in units for behaviour disorders.

This need for schools to be more proactive and introspective about students' aberrant behaviour led to an interest in a more holistic approach to education as provided by the psychology of Jung and the process of alchemy.

An Overview Of Alchemy

It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss at length the very complicated process of alchemy and interested readers may refer to this author's PhD thesis or to the excellent coverage of alchemy by Jung (1951), von Franz (1980), Grossinger (1983), Heinrich (1995) and Ramsey (1997). This paper will focus on the Jung's work in the area of alchemy.

Jung's interest in Eastern philosophy, medicine and alchemy was instrumental in pioneering, certainly in the Western academic world, the belief that the alchemists were ... *only ostensibly and secondarily involved in a chemico-physical process* (Grossinger, 1983, p.278). Primarily, the chemical changes in the inanimate substances involved in the alchemic process, were a means, a vehicle, for the unconscious, introspective human transformation of the alchemists through their own involvement. Alchemy, in Jung's view, had less to do with the chemical experiments and more to do with the exploration of the psyche, which was expressed in pseudo-chemical language. In other words the rituals, symbols, secrecy and complicated processes of *The Great Work* concealed a psychological course in introspection and self-change and it is this on which Jung based what he called *analytical psychology*.

Jungian alchemy is based on the three stages of Ancient alchemy: *The Lesser Work*, *The Middle Work* (a term coined by this author) and *The Great Work*, as shown in Figure 1.

In Jung's view involvement in this process of alchemy has the potential to bring about effective, expansive and important change by assisting to make the foundations of the psyche more secure. Involvement in the process shown in Figure 1 facilitates and allows extremely difficult, harmful, hurtful or confronting experiences to be perceived as positive experiences, as a different perception is allowed to flood into consciousness.

Figure 1
An Overview of Jungian Alchemy

The Lesser Work: Nigredo
Symbol: Lead
The Ego State
Projection and transference of the contents of the shadow.
Beliefs: It is somebody else's fault. Life isn't fair.
Question: Whose fault is this? Why is it happening to me?
The Middle Work: Albedo
Symbol: Silver
The Beginning of the Process of Introspection
Introspection and withdrawal of projection and of transference.
Beliefs: I can't understand it. I can't help it.
Questions: What does it mean? Why is it happening?
The Great Work: Rubedo
Symbol: Gold
A State of Higher Consciousness in all Things
Self-awareness and the desire to make the world a better place.
Beliefs: I can help others. I can make a difference.
Questions: What can I learn from this? What is the bigger picture?

Jung identified seven major concepts that facilitate higher consciousness and these are shown and definitions given in Figure 2.

Figure 2
The Processes of Jungian Alchemy

Concept	Jungian Alchemy
Participation mystique	The reflection of what is happening within, in the unconscious, reflecting without, in the conscious world.
The shadow	The darker side of the psyche, where unresolved issues and repressed feelings lie.
Projection	The unconscious and involuntary attribution of the contents of one's shadow onto others.
Transference	All the exceedingly complex processes that bind people together in any situation.
Cryptomnesia	The unconscious recollection of a thought that one feels is one's own.
Synchronicity	Meaningful coincidence. The recognized triad of space, time, causality.
Individuation	The feeling of standing on solid ground within oneself. Self-understanding.

This author took the process and concepts of alchemy as described above and employed them with a target group of boys as described in the research study.

The Study

The research question that was investigated in the study was *to what extent could Jung's alchemic process and concepts lead boys through the alchemic process and change their aberrant behaviour?* Out of a sample of twenty boys with identified and clinically diagnosed behaviour disorders, a group of seven boys was selected to be involved in the program, along with their teachers and parents. Parental and teacher permission for the involvement of the boys in the research was a prerequisite to inclusion in the study. Figure 3 shows an overview of the procedures and the research methodology used in the study.

Figure 3
Overview of Procedures and Methodology

The Research Paradigm	= Qualitative Research
through	through
Ethnographic Studies	= The Aberrant Behaviour of Boys
through	through
The Methodology	= Action Research
through	through
Methodological Triangulation	= Different Methods/Same Study
through	through
The Data Collection Methods	= 1 Participant Observations kept in a dated Research Journal
through	2 Narrative and Written Records
The Data Reporting Method	3 IST(B) Referrals
through	4 IST(B) Evaluations
	5 In-Depth, Taped Interviews
	through
	= Discourse Analysis

For the purposes of this paper, one boy's program will be overviewed and described, a boy who was referred to in the research study by the alias of Jimmie.

Jimmie's Program

Jimmie was a seven-year-old boy in Year 1 at an inner city school. He was referred to the IST(B) service because he was a student of above average intelligence who was underachieving at school, he displayed some bizarre and sometimes dangerous and violent behaviours, he exhibited a morbid obsession with death and dead things, and it was thought that he might have suicidal tendencies as he frequently talked about his own death and threatened to kill himself. He was being seen by a child psychologist and had a history of violence and aggression towards others – both adults and peers.

a) The Intervention

Using the baseline data provided by the school and IST(B) observational baseline data, Jimmie's program became one that addressed his needs, as he perceived them to be. In other words, the intervention honoured his perception of the problem and established a suitable intervention. Also, through the free interaction of the alchemic processes described above, Jimmie's program was allowed to unfold and reveal itself on a needs' basis. Figure 4 below, gives an overview of Jimmie's alchemic journey.

Figure 4
An Overview of Educational Alchemy for Jimmie

Nigredo	Suicidal tendencies. Morbid obsessions. Violent. Unpredictable.
Ego state	Bizarre Behaviours. Inappropriate social skills.
Projection of the shadow	The recurring nightmare. Academic failure
Albedo	Connectedness to IST(B). Participation mystique.
Withdrawal of projection	Involvement in dream therapy. Curriculum modification. Connection with parents, psychologist. Team approach. Setting –up of whole class behaviour management system.
Rubedo	Confrontation with dream monster. Unmasking of persona.
Moving towards individuation	Acceptance by teachers and peers. Making and having friends. Synchronistic events. Beginning of academic and social success.

b) Behavioural Change

In the research study, baseline data was compared to post-intervention data to evaluate and measure if the use of alchemy could facilitate observable behavioural change in the case studies. The results were positive as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5
An Overview of Jimmie's Behavioural Change

Baseline Data	Dangerous, suicidal tendencies and actions. Running into moving traffic. Hiding under vehicles. Running away from adults.
Ego state	Bizarre Behaviours. Morbid obsessions with dead things.
Projection of the shadow	Hitting, biting, scratching, fighting with peers. Stealing. Inability to access the curriculum. Poor writing, motor skills.
Intervention	Strong connection with IST(B). Painting, drawing a dream book.
Withdrawal of projection	Establishing friendships with peers. Following rules of games. IST(B) meetings with parents, grandparents and psychologist. Establishing school/ home approach to behaviour management.
	Changing class teacher's attitude towards Jimmie and his family.
Post Intervention	Acceptance by family that Jimmie was being physically abused.
Moving towards individuation	Acceptance by teachers and peers. Making and having friends. Jimmie displaying a happy, smiling, friendly demeanour.
	Working to ability at school. Increase in reading age.

Results and Conclusion

The success of such an approach was clearly demonstrated in Jimmie's case, as in all the interventions in the research. Jung (1951) and von Franz (1975; 1980) would argue that in each intervention, each team of people constituted an alchemic mixture, and it was this mixture that brought about the corresponding positive change in behaviour. Furthermore, once this was achieved, the referred boys were able, some of them for the first time, to experience social and academic success: to find *the inner gold*.

One answer to the conundrum of boys' aberrant behaviour and their inability to change it may lie in one of the most interesting findings of this study. With all of the seven boys involved in the research, it became clear that when these boys were caught in the nigredo state, they were virtually unable to be helped. For Jimmie, while he was caught in the recurring nightmare of the nigredo (physical abuse that nobody believed was happening), it was painfully obvious that he was beyond reach. Jung calls the nigredo the *ego-bound state* and describes it as an egocentric state where one's self and one's problems are regarded as the centre of all things. When boys are operating out of this state, changing behaviour is extremely difficult because everything in the conscious world is seen through, or viewed from behind, each boy's dominant unconscious and problematic issue, which is suppressed and often repressed in the unconscious of each boy. This author coined the term *egocentric issues* to describe these because they seem to dominate the nigredo, the ego state. In fact, it may be that boys are simply not able to move into the albedo and rubedo states unless their egocentric issues are resolved. Thus, teaching boys strategies to move out of the nigredo may be a most useful strategy to employ and doing so may actually allow boys to then access the many different strategies and approaches to behaviour change and special education available to them.

A new approach to working with boys with aberrant behaviour and behaviour disorders is urgently required in schools around the world. This paper has outlined one such approach: the use of Jung's process of alchemy. If schools are to meet the future needs of boys and find ways to assist them to change their aberrant behaviour and achieve in the education system

and in society, this model of educational alchemy that brings boys out from behind their egocentric issues, through understanding of their own behaviour to positive behaviour change and ultimately greater academic and social success, is one way of achieving this aim. Basically, educational alchemy is, as one student in the study group liked to call it *Going for gold*.

Nourishing and caring for the psyche of boys through such programs as educational alchemy, may ensure that boys have the means to find endless solutions to their own problems, to the problems of aberrant male behaviour and to that of masculinity itself. Teachers have a huge role to play in this process and through a change in individual consciousness, could make enormous changes in education and in society. As catalysts for change teachers could, in fact, greatly assist boys, schools, the education process, parents and carers and society as a whole. Coming from the heart and empowering students both educationally and emotionally to lead fulfilled lives is the challenge for education in the 21st Century, in the Aquarian Age, and future generations will judge to what extent this challenge was accepted.

Further research with the use of alchemy may provide another avenue of assisting schools and society to cater for the increasingly problematic behaviour of some boys and young men. The possibility of this approach being used with girls, young women and adults who display aberrant behaviour may indicate a wider application of Jung's alchemic theory.

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